



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

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Front Royal woman receives Governor's Caregiver Recognition Award *Love and dedication keep her caring for others*

Richmond, VA — Karen Cockrell does not live in a house. She lives in a true home – one filled with love and compassion. Since 2000, Cockrell, of Front Royal, has welcomed dozens of needy children into her home. She provides care for those who need it most - abused, neglected, abandoned and runaway children, as well as those in transition from foster homes or whose family situation does not allow for care by a relative.

Cockrell is one of only nine people throughout the Commonwealth to receive the Governor's Volunteer Caregiver Recognition Award. The annual awards program, in its second year, is sponsored by the Virginia Council on the Status of Women. Cockrell and the other eight recipients were honored on Feb. 21. Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) Commissioner Anthony Conyers, Jr., members of the Virginia General Assembly and representatives from the Virginia Council on the Status of Women attended the ceremony to honor this year's recipients and the more than one million unpaid caregivers within Virginia.

"The Caregiver Award symbolically honors the thousands of Virginia caregivers who lovingly take care of family and friends day-after-day. Although the award is only given to a few caregivers, it serves as a reminder of the tremendous contributions all caregivers within the Commonwealth make," Conyers said.

Often, children in need are placed with Cockrell on a very short notice, yet she unselfishly rearranges her schedule to make the placement of a child work. In many cases, children placed in Cockrell's care have come from traumatic situations, leaving them frightened and unsure who to trust. She devotes countless hours to helping the children, reassuring them and treating them as her own.

Karen Cockrell's care of needy children is part of a growing trend across the country and the Commonwealth. Hundreds of thousands of Virginians have voluntarily taken on the responsibility of being the sole caregiver for family members or friends.

In addition to Cockrell, this year's recipients included:

- Jean Beckett of Virginia Beach, who has been a caregiver since 1980, assisting her mother, father, grandmother and adult stepdaughter
- Loretta Stapleton of Big Stone Gap, who provides round-the-clock care for her mother, who is battling Alzheimer's Disease
- Carolyn Seward of Richmond, who put her career aside to aid seven young family members, including two who have developmental disabilities
- Valerie Logan of Richmond, who for 17 years, has been the sole caregiver of her daughter, who was born prematurely at just 29 weeks, weighing only two pounds
- Barbara Matheny of Hopewell, who, despite her own health problems, cares for her ill daughter and four young grandchildren
- Henry Tyson of Hampton, who, at nearly 90, has provided full-time care for his ailing wife for the last seven years, allowing her to stay at home, as opposed to a nursing home
- Irene Imbrongo of Lynchburg, who provides constant care for her husband in his battle with progressive Alzheimer's Disease
- John Blanks of Richmond, who has become the primary caregiver for his mother and grandmother since his father passed away

Nationally, it is estimated there are more than 44 million volunteer caregivers. The need for such individuals is expected to increase throughout the next 25 years as the population grows and ages. The Governor's Volunteer Caregiver Award recognizes and honors those who lovingly and voluntarily provide care for family and friends and is intended to publicly celebrate their contributions, as well as bring awareness to the issue of volunteer caregiving.

For more information, visit:

<http://www.dss.virginia.gov>

http://www.dss.virginia.gov/community/council_women/caregiver.html

http://www.dss.virginia.gov/news/2007/pr_caregivers_03-01-2007.pdf

<http://www.dss.virginia.gov/family/as/caregiver.html>

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Editor's note: Interviews and additional photos available upon request.